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SUBJECT: HIGH-LEVEL GOR PERSONNEL MOVES: SHELL GAME OR
SERIOUS BUSINESS?

Classified By: Ambassador John R. Beyrle; Reasons 1.4(b/d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Blessed by the Kremlin, a list of 100 names of potential presidential appointees reflects compromises between elite groups loyal to Medvedev and Putin. While the list pleased some interested in greater transparency in personnel policy, the revised version that includes the son of a Putin crony then named governor of Pskov has quieted initial cheers. It remains to be seen whether Medvedev will expand the "Golden 100" to 1000 names and ultimately use it to fill senior-level jobs, and whether those dispatched to the regions will have, by virtue of their "golden" status, any greater influence with Moscow and can aid Medvedev in building his own base of support. End Summary.

Medvedev's Men?

¶2. (C) On February 18, the Kremlin announced the publication of a list of 100 of an anticipated 1000 names of persons who would constitute a reserve from which the President would draw in making future appointments under his purview. The list was prepared from inputs of up to 11 names provided by each of approximately 170 unnamed experts "in whom the President places great trust." Based on an early flurry of press reports sourced to presidential advisors Sergey Naryshkin and Vladislav Surkov, the "Golden 100" have been spun by political experts as a first step by Medvedev in placing people with his, rather than Putin's imprimatur, in positions of influence. It also fulfills Medvedev's campaign promise to develop and promote a new generation of young leaders, and to give the most promising officials opportunities to assume leadership positions at the national and regional levels.

¶3. (C) The reality is that almost a year into his presidency, 85-90 percent of Kremlin personnel serving Medvedev are holdovers from Putin's presidency, people who owe their jobs and influence to the current Prime Minister (including, of course, Medvedev himself). In the regions, all except a few governors and presidential representatives to territorial districts are Putin appointees, which has enabled Putin and United Russia to exclusively control state-managed administrative resources and government and political decision-making, including on personnel issues, while at the same time leaving Medvedev with no concrete influence other than to rely on the prestige that comes to come from his office, not his person.

¶4. (C) Months after Medvedev himself criticized bureaucratic lethargy in combating the crisis, experts suggest that the economic crisis provided a window for framing a "cadres" policy that would have a distinctive Kremlin imprint. In light of the economic crisis, Presidential advisor Arkadiy Dvorkovich amplified Kremlin discontent with inefficient and unenthusiastic implementation of the president's imperatives in a speech in Krasnoyarsk February 27, hinting that further changes in mid to higher level GOR echelons are imminent. Whereas intimations of change during the autumn were considered signs of weakness that would be exploited by political opposition, deepening economic, political and social uncertainty has led the Kremlin to reverse course and to promote the publication of the list as a means of

conveying to citizens that their government is open to new ideas and people.

With Putin Loyalists Added

¶5. (C) While the Golden 100 may be Medvedev's initiative, a closer look at their biographies indicates a likely compromise between the Kremlin and the White house. Aleksey Mukhin of the Center for Political Information outlined a process, orchestrated by Naryshkin, that balanced the numbers of explicitly Medvedev and Putin loyalists among the first 100. He said his examination of the backgrounds and statements of the persons indicated roughly one-third for Putin, one-third for Medvedev, with the remaining third (including the limited number of non-political public figures on the list, such as scientists and academics) not openly in the camp of one or the other.

¶6. (C) As the arbiter of the list, Naryshkin was able to bridge differences among elite groups loyal separately to the President and Prime Minister and Political observer Mikhail Vinogradov, General Director of "Trends" political consultancy group and advisor for United Russia, told us that Medvedev loyalists had forced the publication of the list in order to prevent further tinkering with it. In that light, Vinogradov said, the "Golden 100" is interesting as a way of examining the balance between the two camps, but may not be used much. What will matter will be how the next 900 and then the other lists are agreed upon, and their overlap with the personnel lists that United Russia is preparing.

Who's on the List?

¶7. (C) Already being referred to as "the best of the best, the elite of the elite," The persons on the list can be sorted into four categories:

-- Persons who have already evinced political, business or managerial potential. The list includes 26 people already serving in promising mid and upper-middle level positions at the federal level, as well as 22 regional officials and 31 business leaders. The Kremlin has clearly highlighted these people as the vanguard of new ideas, the first of many talented people who will bring real world management experience to government.

-- Someone's protege. Some have suggested that the first 100 constitute, more significantly, an important sample of power patron's who were, for their own purposes, interested in ensuring that their protgs made the list, thereby enhancing the patron's prestige. The "Who's Who" has already prompted jockeying among observers and analysts in Moscow who tout the number of persons with whom they have close ties as a means of demonstrating their own prowess.

-- "Young" people who it is believed have potential. Chief of Staff Naryshkin, echoing Medvedev's own pronouncements on his vision for personnel policy, emphasized the importance of giving a new generation of leaders drawn from throughout the country the possibility to serve in position of responsibility. The goal in pulling together the presidential, national and regional lists is to focus on people from ages 25 to 50 years; the average age of the first 100 is 36 years. Note: Notably 11 of the 100 have participated in USG-sponsored exchange programs, including Library of Congress's Open World, State Department exchange programs (Regional Scholar or Voluntary Visitor) or have pursued other studies in the U.S.

-- Heavyweights. These people are already serving in positions of great responsibility, so it is unclear whether they would accept any new position - likely only if it could be considered a promotion or stepping stone to even higher office or more lucrative follow-on. Several commentators have zeroed in on the inclusion of Konstantin Kosachev, chairman of the Duma's International Relations Committee. At

age 46 and in a position that affords him a platform and prominence in Russian and international foreign policy circles, most agree that Medvedev would need to offer him a major appointment to lure him from the Duma.

Will It Mean Anything?

¶8. (C) Opinions vary as to the objectivity, sustainability and ultimately the relevance of the "list" project. Indeed, just a day after the fanfare of the list the Kremlin announced that Medvedev had also authorized the development of similar reserve lists for military forces, Ministry of Interior forces and civilian defense authorities. No explanations were providing as to how the "siloviki" lists would be compiled. Indeed, many perceive that task to be considerably more difficult, given the opaqueness of those services. Indeed, sources within the General Staff commented that lists of potential candidates for military posts have existed since Soviet times, and that nomination of candidates for those lists, unlike those for the presidential list, will remain the providence of security officials.

¶9. (C) Citing the calls from Medvedev loyalist Igor Yurgens for real political competition and open debate about the course the country's political, financial and business elites have charted through the current global storm, others have heralded the presidential start. Mercator Political Group President Dmitriy Oreshkin told us that, while he was initially skeptical, he now believes that Medvedev is intent upon creation of a more open presidential assignment process. Russian Newsweek editor Mikhail Fishman, however, dismissed the whole exercise as nothing but Kremlin pr. Eurasia Foundation's Kortunov likened it to a government citation of good citizenship - not a bad thing, but not something that tips the balance when power politics and patronage still drive the system. Higher School of Economics Professor Andrey Sitnikov told us that the list would accomplish nothing more than to delineate whom Russian elite groupings loyal to Medvedev or Putin should watch out for as they try to undermine each other. "It's not the officials, but the people behind them with money and power willing to use them that matter," he concluded.

¶10. (C) Indeed, observers have already noted discrepancies between penultimate and final versions of the list. Most notable among these was the omission of Andrey Turchak from the earlier version, but who was added to the final. Turchak, son of a judo training acquaintance of Prime Minister Putin, not a native of Pskov and with little political experience at age 33, was named governor of Pskov. The Kremlin spun his appointment, and that of Kremlin advisor Gary Minkh (whose name was on the earlier and final versions) as presidential representative to the Duma, as examples of how the list will now inform decision making on personnel. However, most analysts saw the appointments as demonstrations of who really calls the shots (Putin) on personnel, an example of the same kind of backroom dealing that has always characterized parceling out of prestigious Kremlin job assignments.

Comment

¶11. (C) As with many initiatives from Medvedev, this one has been a long time in coming, and has been launched amid speculation that it is intended to weaken Putin's dominant influence and legacy in personnel policy. Cadre lists have long existed. The appointments of Turchak and Minkh tarnished initial hopes that the list was a new beginning. Sobered by that demonstration of who is really in charge, supporters of the initiative are pinning hopes on Medvedev's ability to continue adding names to the lists and to refine its use over time as a means to introduce openness into a system where the lack of political competition stifles the advancement of officials by virtue of public acknowledgment of their abilities through elections. They also see a chance for the President to slowly put his supporters in positions

of authority and for him to build a support base loyal to him personally. Whether in a managed democracy there is enough space for not just people whom Medvedev (and Putin) trust to propose personnel, but for independent political, media and business leaders to also do so will determine if Medvedev's professed transparency is meaningful.

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